

**W**hen *The Secret Life Of Us* newcomer Christian rolled onto our TV screens last year with his sexy gardening get-up, cute smile and an admirable dedication to his local laughing club, the women of Australia shuffled a little closer to the set – then took to the parks of Australia to follow his lead.

Laughing clubs – where you meet a group of strangers in a park and make like a kookaburra – are taking off in Australia, thanks in part to Christian's enthusiasm. *New Woman*-er Jane Keighley went along to see what all the giggling was about...

'I couldn't believe I was standing among a group of strangers in a park at 8am on a Sunday morning, and I was expected to laugh. I had, I figured, very little to laugh about unless one considers a nasty hangover and about five hours of sleep something to guffaw about, and I certainly didn't.



Bozo's Sean Connery impersonation cracked them up every time...

# Laugh? I nearly...

Why laughter clubs really are the best medicine

Besides, I felt a bit silly because there were crowds of people staring and, I'm sure, sniggering at us. But I'd committed myself to laughing and laugh I would – even if I had to fake it – because let's face it, how can you really laugh with people you don't know?

Well, I was about to find out. Firstly, we had to walk around in a circle and greet each other with a type of oriental bow, while laughing and looking into each other's eyes. Not a bad start. We warmed up our facial muscles by pulling really stupid faces and then started clapping and chanting ho-ho-ho-ha-ha-ha.

And then the fun began. Our first laugh was a lawnmower laugh, where we had to pretend we were starting a lawnmower.

But like most lawnmowers, it took several attempts to start. As we were firing up the mower we had to laugh; haa, haaa, haaaa, haaaaa each time. When we'd started our imaginary mowers we proceeded to mow the grass while laughing hysterically. And the funny thing was, by this time I really WAS laughing – so much in fact that my stomach was hurting and my face was aching.

Then we acted like monkeys, laughed like kookaburras, argued while laughing and stuck out our tongues, raised our paws and laughed like lions. But the best one was the tantrum laugh where we stamped our feet and had a full blown toddler tantrum while partaking in a good belly laugh. The whole experience was surprisingly invigorating – at the end of the session I felt fantastic, and I was incredibly happy for the rest of the day.'

*Laugh your way around Australia! Most laughing clubs are held at outdoor locations and are either free or by donation. For more info about laughing in your state, contact:*

NSW – Shirley Hicks ph: (02) 9879 4865,  
Vic/Tas – Phillipa Challis ph: (03) 5221 4266, Qld – Susan Welch ph: (07) 3268 1036, SA/NT – Peter Salema ph (08) 8336 5417, WA – Ian Hall ph: (08) 9417 1832.

## THE LAUGHTER LOWDOWN

In 1995, Indian physician Madan Kataria developed Hasya Yoga – a combination of yoga and laughter. Madan's theory is that vigorous laughter plus stretching and deep breathing, can boost immune function and improve wellbeing.

And studies have shown he's right – a good, hearty laugh is important for your overall health. According to a study by the UCLA School of Medicine in America, laughing boosts the body's natural defences, relieves pain and reduces stress-hormone levels.

Other studies have shown it gives your internal organs a workout and makes your heart beat faster, which pumps more blood and oxygen around your body, making you fitter.

Susan Welch, who runs a laughing club in Brisbane, says 'Laughing works well for depression as it uplifts beta-endorphins and serotonin. And it's very hard to be sad while you're laughing.'

But what if you don't think it's funny? 'Fake it 'til you make it,' says Susan. 'If you act happy in a session, let go of your ego and cast inhibitions aside, you'll find it hard not to laugh.' **nw**



Hands up who thinks this is funny!